

IMAGE ENGINEERINGS MECHANICAL EFFECTS FOR

A Nightmare ON ELM STREET 3 DREAM WARRIORS

BY RON MAGID

In *A Nightmare on Elm Street Part III*, Freddy Krueger is back with a vengeance—and he means business. The newest entry in a series that is designed to keep its audience always guessing where they stand in that narrow no-man's land between sleep and consciousness pits the seemingly undefeatable Freddy against a group of "Dream Warriors": young men and women who have been trained to fight this evil on his own turf, in their dreams. The film promises to be a real frightfest, packed with dozens of mechanical and makeup effects to keep fans on the edge of their seats.

OVER FIFTY MECHANICAL EFFECTS

Handling the film's fifty or more mechanical effects are Peter Chesney and his crew, who collectively refer to themselves as Image Engineering. Housed in a two-storey industrial complex located in Burbank, the relatively new company has contributed excellent work to a large number of genre films. The problem with this one, according to Chesney, has been to get the extremely large number of effects completed in an unusually short period of time. "The real trick to this film is handling the logistics," he says. "We had very little time during pre-production, now we're

still fooling around with last minute insert shots, and they've got Coming Attractions running for the film up on Hollywood Boulevard already! Usually the time between the completion of principal photography and the release of a film is six months, so this is an unusually tight schedule, because we're expected to have everything done and the film in the can just two months after photography was completed! The schedule was so tight that I had to have ten guys on-set and fifteen fabricating effects back at the shop during the entire filming. We had three units shooting at one time with effects on every unit. Same time, different locations, so I had to run back and forth between units just to keep up with it. At least I think it's all coming together well from what little I've seen at the editor's office."

Any five of the effects Chesney and his crew had to come up with for *Nightmare III* would have been sufficient to startle and amaze even the most jaded horror fan. A brief listing amply illustrates the diverse effects required to bring Freddy's menace to the screen: An enormous snake which wraps itself around a room, a "Freddy Wheelchair" which chases a crippled boy, a Dali-esque melting tricycle, water faucets that come to life and metamorphose into Freddy's hands,



exploding mirrors, a hospital room turning into Freddy's boiler room and a junkyard that comes to life!

MELTING TRICYCLES & MIRRORS

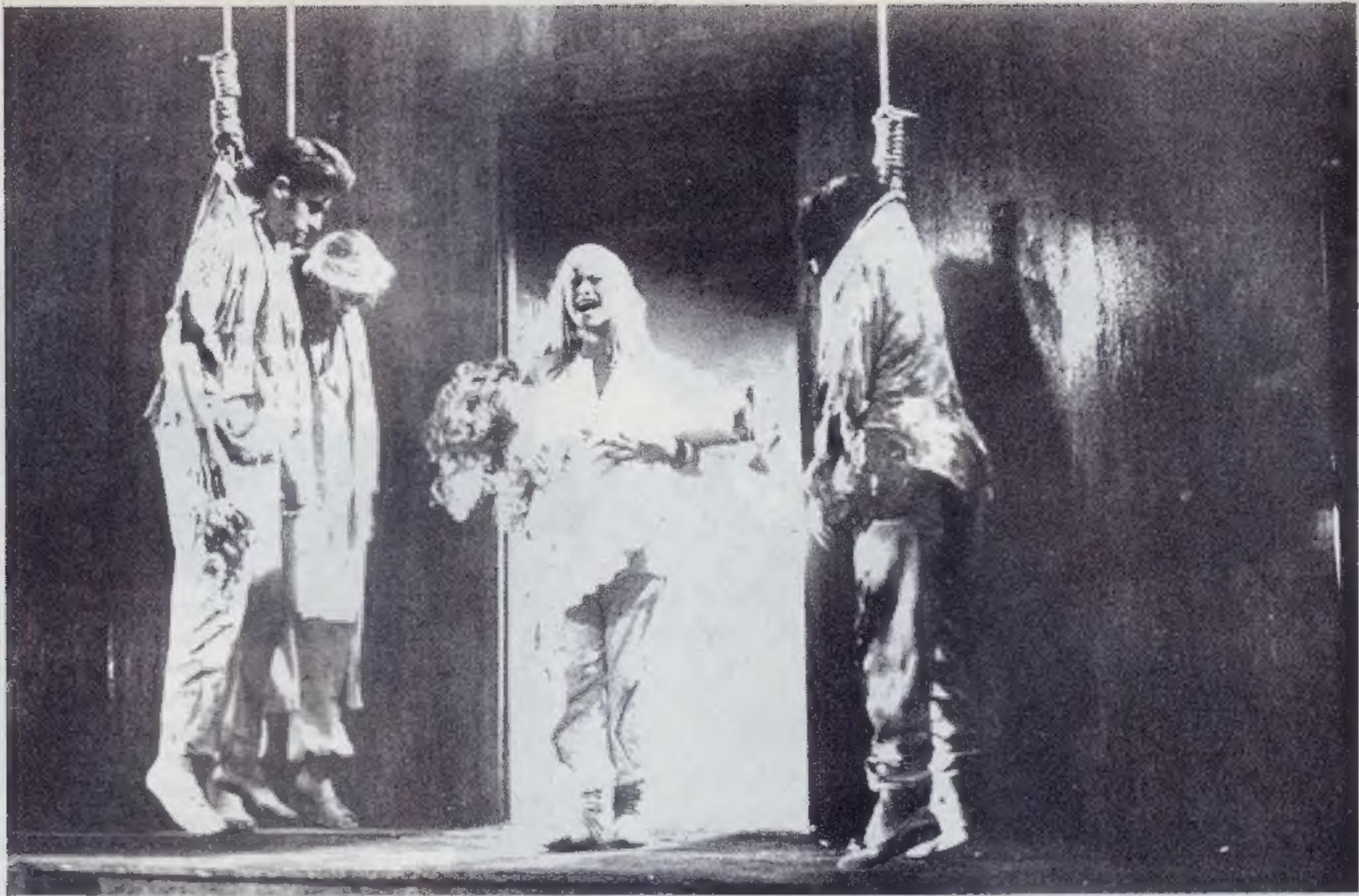
To pull off the effect of a melting tricycle, Chesney originally planned to cast the piece in wax, and then melt it using conventional heating techniques, but the director had other plans. "He wanted it to roll into a room

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**FREDDY'S BACK...
AND LOOKING FOR TROUBLE!**





Kristen Parker (Patricia Arquette) encounters a gruesome Nightmare on Elm Street.

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leaving bloody tire tracks, and then melt like a watch in a Dali painting," Chesney says. He didn't want to see it start to drip, he just wanted to see it smoke and melt, so we cast a real tricycle in various grades of polyurethane foam rubber, and then we used extremely fine, hair-sized wire to make the bike appear to melt. It was an eleven hour set-up and it took twenty-six wires. We had to do a lot of testing to get the spokes to collapse just right."

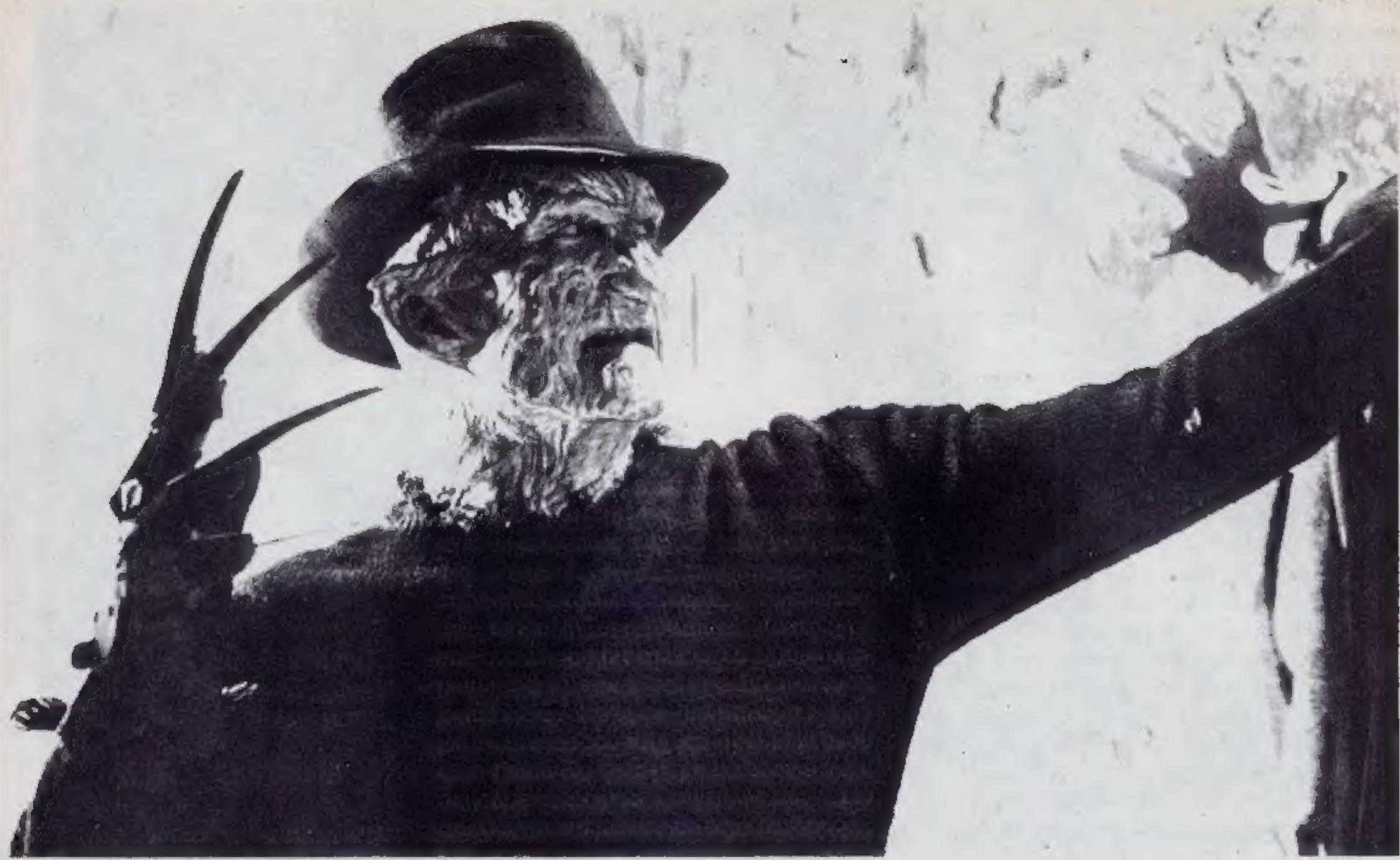
Another elaborate effect involves a roomful of mirrors that shatter simultaneously as the Dream Warriors burst through the glass. The hard part was to make everything happen on cue, so Chesney rigged an electronic release system that ran to all the slingshot mechanisms which shattered the glass from behind the mirrors. "We had nineteen mirrors that exploded at once," he marvels, "and we had stunt doubles leaping out from behind some of them. Half of the mirrors were tempered glass and the other half were real, but I wanted the

stunt people to come out of the tempered glass mirrors because in stunt work, they can actually get cut up just as bad with either. The tempered glass all goes at once, it turns into popcorn-sized stuff so it was better for safety's sake. We had all our hardware hidden behind paper we put behind the mirrors, so you would see something in back of them after they exploded, and on the count of three, I hit the button that ran through all the release wires, and the stunt people launched themselves through at the same time. We had the materials to do it again, but I sure hoped we could do it in one take. Fortunately, we did."

For another sequence in which one of the Dream Warriors must confront Freddy in a bathroom mirror, Chesney had to devise a way in which the hot and cold water porcelain fixtures could change into Freddy's hands. Chesney had the porcelain handles actually cast in latex, so they could stretch, and one of the handles is even equipped with small knives! The handles pop out of the top of the sink on copper plumbing "arms" and attack the unfortunate

victim.

Another similar effect occurs when Freddy pops out of a tv set, an effect which required that Chesney's crew build five dummy televisions, each equipped with a different function. Although they cast a real television to begin with, the actual model brand name, if anyone has time to look, is Krueger Vision! "The first set had a puppet rig of Freddy's head which pushed up through a rubber membrane at the top of the tv. We used a vacuum to pull the membrane down tight so it would accurately reveal the facial features, kind of like a Videodrome effect, except we took it a little further. By actually bringing the membrane all the way in, we were able to match the puppet head to our actor's face, and at that point, we substituted the actor, and then he began to talk. Another tv set was rigged so that Freddy's arms could burst out of the side, grab this girl who's watching, and smash her head through the screen!" The arms that emerge from the sides of the tv were all machined metal incorporating various elements like vacuum tubes



The horrifying wrath of Freddy Krueger (Robert Englund)...

that you could actually find in a tv set! Of course the hands are equipped with the blades that are Freddy's trademark.

NIGHTMARE VISIONS

Those blades are also present in Chesney's design for the Freddy wheelchair—the arms of the chair have Freddy's gloves mounted on them, and the radio-controlled fingers were designed to drum impatiently as the chair chases one of the Dream Warriors who is, by day, a cripple, but who can run in his dreams. The chair is adorned with all manner of spikes and weaponry, and stands approximately six feet high. "We designed it right from the drawings on up to give it a big, scary look," says Chesney. "We also built a track system for the chair so it could chase the stuntman down this hallway, but the chair wasn't moving fast enough so I mounted it on an ATV (All Terrain Vehicle) so I could see how fast that guy could run! The one stipulation was that I got to drive it! We mounted the camera on the chair, so

that part of the chair would be in the shot, as if it were from the chair's point of view. Later on, one of the warriors, who is a wizard in his dreams, zaps the chair and it explodes into a lot of little pieces, so we constructed an identical chair entirely out of cardboard so that it would break up without creating any shrapnel, itself, and we were able to get some nice wheelies out of it as it chased the kid down the hall, and Freddy's voice would scream out, 'This chair's for you, kid!'"

For another sequence in which an entire junkyard comes to life almost as a parody of *Night of the Living Dead*, Chesney and company wound up spending a lot of time stacking old junkers with forklifts and making burnt out engines start, at least for one shot. "The engine gag worked out very nicely," he recalls. "It kind of takes off across the ground! Since the whole junkyard is supposed to come to life, we spent a lot of time crawling inside of these old cars trying to get old windshield wipers to work and so on. We also dumped a whole stack of cars

over. It took a whole day to get these cars stacked. We were limited by the height of the forklifts, so the stack was about five or six cars high. We had to tip the cars over on cue so they would smash this new car up, so we ended up doing that with a forklift, which was a real crude way of doing it, but it worked!"

DEAD PIGS LIVE AGAIN!

The effect Chesney claims to be his favorite from the entire shoot seems like it would almost be more disgusting to have done than to witness on screen: the reanimation of a truly dead pig. "It was fun because this pig carcass had been hanging around for a couple of weeks so it wasn't exactly smelling great!" Chesney laughs. "It didn't have any organs inside it, but the head and all the meat were still there, and we had to make it leap up on this girl's dress and bark! We could've molded it if we'd had more time, but it was probably better with all the skin and stuff falling apart. I hope it survives

well in editing, because to me, there was something about it that made it my favorite effect. I guess because we didn't have to work that hard on it!"

The film's most complicated mechanical gag was for a sequence that entails Freddy becoming a huge snake which wraps its body about a normal-size room. The entire snake is never visible, but its form can plainly be distinguished running under the floorboards and behind the walls and ceiling, because the room buckles and bends and cracks wherever the snake's form passes. "We built a track behind the walls, floor and ceiling of the set that would drag a snakelike object that would cause the walls to break open, revealing the skeleton of the building beneath. We made the guards all out of sheet metal, so the snake could whip around pretty fast. The art department built the breakaway walls from a high-lime concentration plaster which made them real weak. Underneath that we had false wood and prescored lumber so that everything would just fall apart. You'll see the walls and floor breaking up as it first runs across the floor, then up a wall, around a corner and down into the floor again. Then, all of a sudden, there's nothing. The camera looks around with the actress that's in the room, and then the snake bursts through the floor at her feet and picks her up towards the ceiling.

"That was an interesting job to get her to the right mark, especially since when the snake's head was finally sculpted, its mouth was actually smaller than the actress' feet! The snake with Freddy's head is supposed to swallow her past her knees on the first bite, and then carry her through the ceiling, but the mouth was only seven inches wide and her feet were nine! So for just this one shot, we ended up putting her in high-heeled sneakers! It became very important that she hit her mark exactly, so they built a trap for her feet. The entire set was constructed nine feet above ground so that we had room for the enormous amount of machined aluminum hardware we needed to propel that snake up through the floor. We only handled the larger movements of the snake. The sculpture, the facial and eye movements and the paint were all handled by the makeup crew."



Kristen Parker protects Nancy (Heather Langenkamp) from Freddy...



Evil dwells in Freddy's nightmare house on Elm Street...

FEAR ON A BUDGET

The major triumph, Chesney notes, in bringing these effects to the screen for *A Nightmare on Elm Street Part III*, is that he and his crew had very little money to throw around; instead, they were forced to rely on their own ingenuity

"We did get a little carried away with the tvs," he admits, "and we did go a little over budget on that. We did all of this stuff, fifty or more gags, on a limited budget. It's not like working on *Poltergeist* or anything that has a high budget. We had to work within the limitations of the storyboards and design our effects exactly to that." ■